/15/ The Birth

787

He has arrived! The heir! It is really a boy! How clever the astrologist is after all! True, with Tsewang Paljor in the neighboring village his prediction did not prove correct last year. The onpo had calculated a boy, and a girl was born. Just a girl! The enraged father went to the onpo and demanded to have his fee for the false horoscope returned. The onpo laughed at the angry father and said boldly to his face: "Bon-bu-t'sogs (you ass)! Did you not tell me Capricorn, when I asked you the constellation under which your wife was born? And now it turns out to be Cancer, " of whose existence the disappointed father did not have the faintest notion. The onpo swore by the "Three Jewels" (Buddha, Law, Monkhood) that it was so: and this, of course, had thrown the entire calculation off its track. Thereupon Tsewang Paljor had to march off with a long face, one experience richer, and poorer by ten jau (equals two rupees which equals two Reichsmark), and he had to content himself with the thought that for the time being he would only be able to call a girl his own. But it was after all too stupid of Tsewang Paljor not to know the constellation of his wife's birth! Such a thing simply could not happen to Lobsang Wanggyal, so the latter thought to himself, and rejoiced over his bu-t'sa (boy).

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Old Tsering Putrid, the mother of Lobsang Wanggyal, is an orderly, prudent and cleanly housewife. At the proper time she provides a warm "nest" for the expected grandson. She goes into the pantry and picks out from the old flour sacks made of goatskin one in which the mice have eaten a hole. That does no harm; she sews up the hole. After the little man has now made his entrance into the world with loud crying, he is first wrapped into a rough woollen coat of his father's by his aunt who has taken him in her arms. Grandmother Tsering Putrid meanwhile quickly runs into the goats' /16/ hut; there, in a corner, lies a small heap of old, dried-up goats' dung which she has previously rubbed into fine particles on a stone. Of this she puts six to eight handfuls into the sack. With this she mixes some of the dung of ibexes and wild sheep, which, at her command, her youngest boy has brought with him from the mountains where he has been guarding the goats. The dung from these nimble animals will make the new-born son quick of foot. This secret was once betrayed to her by an old aunt. The latter's son to whom she had applied this expedient, had become messenger for the galon (nobleman and district official). And

844 when he ran from village to village with an important message, no one could keep up with him. That was caused by the ibex dung.

854 Now the "little nest" (Tibetan: T'san-nu) is ready. Into it the little baby is placed, crying and kicking his feet; but he soon calms down when he and the other clean contents of the "little nest" have been put in the right position and he has become warm. He finds everything in his little nest that a Tibetan baby demands first in this world: a warm, soft bed and (Tibetan) cleanliness in his dry dung diaper-substitute; and soon he sleeps so long and deep as only a small Tibetan can sleep.

853 The child does not lack in food. The mother is a strong young woman; she can give her child the natural nourishment by which it flourishes like the numerous children of the mother sparrow that has its nest up in the roof; and she may give this food for at least the next two years, even long after the child is able to walk. This the mother does with an amazingly small amount of trouble and care on her part. Where should she find the time for regular baby care according to European conceptions? Even without this she has her share, and more than her share, of labor and trouble.

846 For his wife who is in lying-in the husband had for a long time kept a sheep ready. This sheep is killed on the day after the birth, and in the evening the young woman enjoys with great appetite a solid meal of meat and rice. What would our German doctors say to this?

312 The same evening, when it has become dark, Lobsang Wanggyal leaves his house. On a narrow path he goes around the village, occasionally looking around cautiously to see whether someone /17/ might be noticing him. He arrives at one of the watering ditches which conduct the water that is so valuable here in the upland valleys, from the glacial stream of the nearby gorge to the bottom of the valley for the irrigation of the fields. The man removes a few stones and pieces of turf from the low dam of the ditch and lets the water run into a branch of the ditch which now leads it to his clover fields
783 and to his orchard with the many apricot trees. While he is still
844 occupied with this, a rough voice calls out: "Lobsang Wanggyal, you impure one (Ba-nag-pa) (2) ! what are you doing with that ditch? You

2. Ba-nag-pa is the name for a person who, by touching the woman who is lying in, or by his mere presence in a house in which the birth took place, has become ritually unclean.

Ro-nag-pa is a person who has become impure through the touching of a corpse. 783 844

will get the Lha (gods) and the Lu (water gods, snake gods) angry at us, and then they will cause our water to fail and the seed on the field to dry up!" Soon there are three, four, and more neighbors on the spot and they all talk excitedly to Lobsang Wanggyal. The latter insists on his good right. Today, he says, after eight days of drought, it is his turn for watering his ground. His brother, he goes on, who does not live in his house, has watered the fields down in the valley; he just wanted to water the clover field and the garden up here still; he had also been very careful not to jump over the ditch, which especially enrages the water nymphs. His drinking water, he says, his niece gets for him at the well. She lived, after all, in the neighboring house and had therefore not become impure, like he, by the birth in his house. His mother placed two earthen jars before the door every morning, which the niece would put back in the same place filled, so that she never had to set foot inside the house. Soon he would also throw a lu-stor, an offering of pills made of bread dough, in the lake and in the well for the water nymphs, in order to appease the Lu and to become absolved. He knew, too, what was fitting and proper for a pious Buddhist. Nobody could accuse him of not honoring and fearing the old gods of the land. But all his talking is of no avail. The old trouble-maker Yontan from the Break-all house will not let him go; he points to the ditch and says that one could see quite clearly that the ditch was already conducting much less water than it usually did in the late evening after a warm day and a great deal of melting of the snow in the mountains. That was, of course, Lobsang Wanggyal's fault; he was going to bring action against him with the district's official. The p'a-spun (3) have to intervene because the men look 692

3. By p'a-spun, literally translated as "father-brothers," that is to say, brothers who have a common father, the Tibetan means a closed fraternity within the village community, which is not necessarily constituted of blood relatives, but who all worship a common god (Tibetan: p'a-lha, that is, Father-God). At all important events within the family and tribe, such as birth, marriage, and death, the p'a-spun gather for joint action and mutual assistance; they are obligated to help each other in every way possible. Their relations and duties are regulated by strict law and ritual. 608

13: Heber and Heber D-3 (1914-25) 1926 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4

much longer than their arms. In winter this is very useful, as the hands can be threaded in the opposite sleeve to keep warm, and any surplus length in a man can always be turned back as a cuff. A woman's trousers are also far longer than her legs, and look very peculiar garments when spread out to dry. But the concertina-like creases into which they fold when worn, and which come right down to the ankle, add all the more warmth in winter. An unmarried girl wears white trousers, but a married woman must wear black, at any rate after the birth of her first son. A woman's *skerag* or waistband is also wide and very long, and wound round her very tightly. Her gown is shaped rather differently from a man's—the bodice and skirt being cut separately, and the latter sewn on to the former with very full pleats, and if it is a best dress the whole is edged with an effective little narrow binding of gay pattern. Occasionally she thinks to enhance her beauty by using the small berries of a common weed, and sticking them all over the upper part of her face, where they look like little yellow spots. These berries are also said to relieve headache, and withdraw superfluous serum. We must also mention the head-dress of the Mussulman women in Leh, for the town contains a large proportion of them. The *perag* is rightly considered an emblem of an idolatrous religion, and should be discarded on changing over to Mohammedanism. Then a white head-dress covering over a little round foundation cap, and hanging in folds to below the waist, is worn. In front is an ornament which may be quite costly, of seed-pearls and turquoises, often arranged to form the sign of the crescent.

Now we come to those important members of the home, the children, and it would be hard to find more fascinating little persons than the elfish little sprites whom we meet in Ladak. To our Western eyes the flattened face and large cheeks of a Mongolian type of baby are particularly quaint.

When Baby is coming, in contrast to the complicated

13: Heber and Heber D-3 (1914-25) 1926 AJ4 W. Tibetans AJ4

844 layettes over which the occidental mother spends so many loving hours, no preparations of clothing are made, but as soon as he has arrived safely, some cloth is fetched from the bazar
843 in which to wrap him. Before his birth his mother must eat a great deal of fat to "oil the wheels" well for his arrival. One other
854 preparation has been made, for goat's dung has been collected, dried (and incidently somewhat sterilized) in the hot sun, then crushed up finely. This powder is then placed on a sheepskin, upon which Baby is laid, and thus all his excretions are absorbed, the powder being changed every day or two. Lactation is continued as long as possible, sometimes to the third year, but the child is also allowed to eat other food, just as he fancies. Some women once visited the Doctor Memsahib on a winter evening and were astonished when she took them to peep at her baby, for had she not left the sleeping child alone, in the dark, and in a cold room with the window wide open? Their babies on the contrary sit on their mothers' laps or crawl about until the grown-ups go to bed, tasting all the supper, and enjoying the warmth, not to say stuffiness, of the big stove, as well as all the light and conversation. While still a tiny mite, Baby is slung in a cloth over the back of his small sister, who makes a little picture of premature motherliness, as she goes to her work or play with a bobbing baby on her back.

857 It is extraordinary how alike childhood is all the world over. These children have a game called the wolf and lamb, very similar to our fox and sheep, in which they will sing "The wolf is not there; to the horse gate we'll go." Then the wolf comes out, and the mother sheep with outstretched arms has to try to protect her little ones, who stand behind her in order of height, while the bad wolf seizes the last and smallest, one after the other until all have been stolen. Then there is a kind of hopscotch, which has come up from India, and an indigenous hide-and-seek called *Yib-ches-lo-lo*. And of course the boys have their games of fashioning idols on the

21: Asboe M-3 (no date) 1932 AJ4 West Tibetans AJ4

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Notes on Childbirth in Manchat (Western Tibet). *By Walter Asboe.*

Certain taboos exist in Manchat in respect to women during their period of menstruation, and also for expectant mothers. During menstruation a woman is not allowed to approach the family hearth, but must eat her food, and perform her household duties at a reasonable distance from the fireplace. She may not wash or handle the kitchen utensils during this period, for she is regarded as ceremonially unclean; and any infraction of the taboo imposed upon her is thought to be a direct affront to the god of the family hearth. **161**

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No restrictions, however, in the way of performing the ordinary domestic duties are laid upon the pregnant woman except that she must be on her guard against the influence of the 'Evil Eye.' She will therefore retire discreetly on the approach of a stranger. A woman may not on any account bear her child in the vicinity of the household temple, or where there are any images of the gods. An apartment in the rear of the house is therefore reserved for this purpose, and failing this, she must retire to an outhouse or shed.

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To cite a personal experience, I was once called to a case of difficult labour, and I found the patient lying in a dark room quite by herself. On urging the occupants of the house to remove the expectant mother to another room where one could at least enjoy the advantage of light and air, they replied that they could not comply with my request, as, by so doing, they would incur the displeasure of their household gods. Further, it is taboo for the daughter of the house to give birth to her child in her own home, so that what frequently happens is that she must find refuge in the shelter of the cowshed.

At a confinement, any cooked food which happens to be in the house is taboo, and must be thrown away, or given to the cattle. Following the birth of a child, the mother is obliged to emerge from the house, accompanied by one or two women, and proceed to the nearest spring. On arrival there, a screen of blankets is erected, behind which she must perform her ablutions. After the birth of the first child, the mother has to wash herself three times, whilst the husband must also purify himself by bathing. By way of propitiating the evil spirits, the mother scatters grain or food hither and thither as she proceeds to the village spring to cleanse herself.

It is also customary to stick an iron trident and an axe into the ground when the ablutions have been performed. In the meantime the placenta is buried in the earth, the hole being dug with the knife which was used for cutting the cord, and the handle of the knife is buried also. During the woman's absence, the floors of the house are freshly mud-washed, and all utensils thoroughly scoured. Should another house lie contiguous to the one in which a confinement occurs, the occupants behave as if the birth had actually taken place in it. On the completion of the ceremonial purification, the mother is covered in a large blanket with two slits in it for the eyes, and returns to her home.

WALTER ASBOE.

24:Peter E-5 (1938)1963 AJ4 West Tibetans AJ4
Ladak

body denied, nevertheless, that jealousy was there, ever-present, under the surface. All they said was that it is kept in check by the necessity of the polyandrous system, which in turn is the result of the dearth of resources which consequently should themselves be shared in so bleak an environment.

The education of the children in a polyandrous household was the next point which I took up. At birth, I heard, there was no midwifery, mothers usually going to the assistance of their daughters and rendering them the necessary service. After that, it was the mother who naturally looked after the baby in its early infancy, often suckling it for a protracted period of from one to three years, depending on subsequent pregnancies. Sometimes, a woman would be assisted in the care of the child by one of her own sisters from outside – either from the house of her parents or from the house she had been married into in *bag-ma*.

Asked what were the rules of cleanliness taught early to a baby, I was told that there were none. Children were left to do absolutely whatever they liked in this respect, and put outside the house to play in the lanes and fields with other children, without any constraint being imposed upon them. Of course, if they dirtied the house, they were scolded and driven outside, but beyond that attitude, the mother never attempted to control them in such matters at all. (This might actually account for the extraordinary freedom of Tibetans everywhere within their cultural area in what concerns evacuatory functions; both men and women seem to have no shame at all in performing on the streets in public and before everybody's gaze. They will also follow Europeans who try to retire in privacy, to see "how they do it" – one of the most embarrassing things about field-work in Tibet.)

Children take to playing very early in the lanes and fields. They make castles of mud and water, and nothing seems to amuse them more during their first years. They then go over to more sophisticated games such as hockey, riding on sticks, playing at being a family, at cultivating the fields with small, imitation hoes, at being bride and bridegroom at a wedding festival. Dolls are made for the girls out of rags, and the boys go about with little axes made of wood. But they seem to tire of such games at times, and often go back to making mud and water pies and constructions.

It is at this stage that paternal authority makes itself felt. I asked who was the father who took over control, expecting it to be the eldest, as he is regarded as the head of the family. But I was told that this was not so, and that it was the father who was the most influential who